Connecticut Historical Society
BULLETIN

Volume 13 Hartford, July, 1948 Number 3

THE WINDSOR DRAW TABLE

CONTRIBUTED BY NEWTON C. BRAINARD

Collectors of antiques and those who are considered authorities on them find a never-failing topic of discussion in the age and origin of unusual pieces. Every collection has some piece which is a favorite subject for speculation. In the Connecticut Historical Society hall the old draw table has started arguments for many years. It was presented to the Society by Henry Halsey, of Windsor, who described it in his will, signed in 1874, as "my English table." Even its descriptive name is usually good for a bit of conversation. Is it a draw table, a drawing table or a draw-leaf table?

Now let us hear what the authorities have said about it.

Dr. Irving Lyon in 1891 made this comment, "From a Matthew Allyn house pulled down about 1830.—Its original height could not have been less than 40 inches. The wood is oak of a deep brown color, too dark, indeed, to be the wood of the American white oak, after full allowance has been made for the effects of time. For this reason, and because the color corresponds so

well to that of old trans-Atlantic oak, we believe that this table was made in Europe and brought to this country in the 17th century.

Drawing tables disappeared from the inventories in the latter part of the 17th century."

In 1901 Luke Vincent Lockwood said it was "made of English oak."

In 1928 Wallace Nutting made this comment, "Drawing table. White oak. Mid 17th century. Only American example.

Most New England tables of this sort with heavy turnings were communion tables. The author has never seen a very heavy example which he believes to have been for any other purpose."

In 1933 he changed his mind on the nature of the table and reversed himself in this manner, "An important discovery has recently been made concerning this table. It has always been entered, in various volumes on furniture, as a drawing table. The author and two well-known connoisseurs recently determined on a more thorough investigation, by which it appeared that the table was always substantially as it is. Some former owner cut slots in the end frames for the insertion of tongued leaves, which, however, had no relation to the original table. The word 'drawing' in the description should therefore be withdrawn."

With these earlier comments in mind, let us consider the table as we now see it. Previously the wood was considered English oak because of its dark color. Seventy odd years in the sun in the Society rooms have bleached it until its color is lighter than the usual American piece. Some visitors have recognized its English origin because of the grain of the wood. The United States Forest Products Laboratory say that they cannot distinguish English white oak from American even under a microscope. Evidently we get little help from white oak in determining the origin of furniture. The size of this piece is, to the writer, the strongest argument in favor of an American origin. At a time when there was an unlimited supply of good oak here and competent craftsmen, it is difficult to imagine the colonists sacrificing space in the tiny ships of that day for a bulky piece of furniture which they could have made in a short time without waiting for months for its arrival from England. Food and staple products would have had first choice in the limited cargo space available.

Any question regarding its age is at best one involving only a few years. From Cescinsky and Gribble's book on English furniture we find that the legs on this table are a pattern which appeared in England about 1590 and continued in use until 1700.

Nutting's last comment was that he was satisfied that it never was a "drawing table." The writer made a quarter-size model in order to satisfy his curiosity as to how a draw table was constructed and used. In making drawings for this model the original was carefully inspected in company with a trained cabinetmaker. Evidence was visible of the former existence of every part of a draw table, while necessary signs that it had been a common table were conspicuously absent. We feel that there is no doubt about this point.

Another detail suggesting American origin is the trace of red stain still existing. This seems to have been used on American pieces almost universally but we find no mention of it by the English authorities.

Inspection showed that turned feet had been sawed off from the legs. When the model was completed it was evident that the original height of the table was approximately forty inches. Dr. Lyon's estimate gives the same height. Since an ordinary table is seldom over thirty-two inches in height, it is evident that this table was not one at which persons sat. It appears to have been a serving table, but for what purpose? We would be in the dark as to any positive suggestion had not the dimensions of the original communion table in the Lyme Church of 1817 come to light recently. This table, designed one hundred years later, was also forty inches high. With this evidence and Mr. Nutting's opinion that all large heavy tables were communion tables, we feel we have reached a sound conclusion when we call this a communion table.

Cescinsky and Gribble, to whom we have referred previously, show many tables of this period which have been preserved in England. A large proportion of them, draw tables as well as plain, were church or "altar" tables. English ordinances forbade the use of elaborate altars in churches during the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. As a result, tables were used as altars.

Now, perhaps rashly, we will summarize the results of our study.

We believe the table to be an American draw table made before 1700. It was a serving table and probably a communion table. As it was found in Windsor, we believe it was made for one of the early Windsor meetinghouses. The present church was built in 1795. Its style was one for which the old table was not appropriate and so it was disposed of. At that time and for many years later there was no sentiment about things of the past. This was particularly true in churches, where it seems to have been the fashion to rebuild the interior about every fifty years. This was done in 1844 with the Windsor meetinghouse. Even the old memorial communion silver of many churches was shamefully sold in order to substitute silver of the latest style or to help out church finances.

It would have been surprising if this old table had not been disposed of. In its original state it was too high for household use, so out come the draw leaves, the feet are sawed off, and we have a table of approximately normal height. In the old Allyn house it stayed until the house was pulled down. Fortunately, Mr. Halsey saw enough merit in it to preserve it, even if he did not know its history, and here in the Connecticut Historical Society it has rested for over seventy years, a model of good workmanship which we can admire and upon which we can speculate.

(Since writing the above we have learned that at Trinity Church, in Newport, R. I., the altar table of 1698, or earlier, "an oaken table," was taken out during the "improvements" of 1837 and used by the carpenters as a workbench. It had been knocked apart and the pieces were being taken home by

one of the workmen for a wash bench when it was rescued by an interested passerby, who had it repaired. Many years later it was returned to the church and today stands in its old position.)

A DOCUMENT FROM THE AARON BURR PAPERS

For some time a lengthy folio size document among the Aaron Burr papers has aroused our interest. It is in Spanish and consists of 66 leaves. We are indebted to Charles Ford, of Montclair, New Jersey, for the following notes and comments.

During the War of 1812 (the exact time is not given) Messrs. Francisco Cabrera and Mariano Conde, import merchants of New York, ordered a mixed cargo from Don Juan Bautista Icard of Havana, Cuba. The merchandise never arrived, and Cabrera and Conde entered suit against Icard. In their complaint was included a charge that Icard had conspired with the Captain, Pablo Gonsales, and the first mate, Pedro Otero, of the brigantine *Los Dos Amigos* to steal the cargo and then try to sink or burn the ship to cover the crime.

In his reply, Icard declared that it had been Cabrera and Conde who had conspired with Otero to make away with the cargo, hide the theft behind destruction of the vessel, and share with them the price of the goods previously stolen and the additional money to be gained from a lawsuit.

The body of the document contains the testimony of Icard, thirty-three witnesses, and Otero's confession. Said Otero: he had sold most of the cargo before *Los Dos Amigos* left Havana. Captain Gonsales was so drunk all through the voyage north that he never knew of the missing items. Because the British were blockading New York, the ship sailed to Newport. There Otero tried to sink the ship. Failing that, he tried to set it afire but was discovered by the captain. At that time he confessed himself in cahoots with Cabrera and Conde. The vessel returned to Havana. For some reason (not given in the testimony) Otero was allowed to escape from Cuba and he took refuge in Florida.

There is nothing in the document to indicate why or how the papers came into Burr's hands. Obviously they must have come to him from the Spanish Consul and therefore suggests Burr had been chosen as his attorney to collect damages or institute criminal action against Cabrera and Conde. The truth of this may be checked (if desirable) by investigating the court records of New York City (or of Newport, R. I.) for the year 1817 or later.

TIMOTHY BUNKER, PSEUD.

The Tim Bunker Papers, or Yankee Farming by Timothy Bunker, Esq., of Hookertown, Conn., (New York: 1868,) was recently purchased for the library. Cushing's *Initials and Pseudonyms* lists William Clift as the author. The Library of Congress card gave his birth date as 1817, but no additional information seemed to be available.

An inquiry on William Clift was referred to our cataloger who unearthed the following information: William Avery Clift, son of William and Nancy (Avery) Clift, was born at Griswold, Connecticut, September 12, 1817. He graduated from Amherst College in 1839 and four years later received a degree from Union Theological Seminary. On December 17, 1844, he was ordained and installed as pastor of the Second Congregational Church of Stonington, Connecticut, where he remained until his dismissal on April 5, 1864. From April 1, 1867 until November 13, 1878 he was supply pastor and pastor of the church at Mystic Bridge. On November 27, 1881 he began his pastorate at Hadlyme, where he remained until his retirement sometime in 1886.

William Clift was much interested in scientific agriculture, fish culture and choice fowls. He was often a contributor to various periodicals and from 1856-1861 was one of the Editors of *The Homestead;* a weekly journal for the farmer, gardener and fruit grower, the manufacturer and mechanic, published in Hartford by Mason C. Weld, Post Office Building. In 1861 this was merged into the *American Agriculturist* of which he was an Associate Editor 1867-68. *The Tim Bunker Papers* appeared first in this periodical. He was one of the founders of the American Fish Culturalists Association and was its first president. For many years he owned extensive trout ponds in Groton.

He married January 1, 1845, Harriet Adeline Peters, daughter of the Rev. Absalom Peters of New York City. They had three children. William Clift died December 9, 1890 at Mystic Bridge "full of years and crowned with honors."

NEWS OF THE SOCIETY

How would you like to buy a John Trumbull portrait for $5.00? Well, in December 1844, that is what Aaron Arnold paid for a portrait of Jane (Arden) Hosack.[1] This portrait, now in our possession, has been described as a "fine specimen of Col. Trumbull's style of portraits."

Jane Arden was born March 2, 1743, daughter of Francis Arden whose family came from England and whose wife's family was of Huguenot ancestry. She was married April 1 or 28, 1768 to Alexander Hosack in New York City. They were the parents of seven children. Alexander Hosack was a native of Elgin, Murrayshire, Scotland and was born August 29, 1736 and died January 9, 1796. Jane (Arden) Hosack died at Morristown, New Jersey, September 30, 1828 and her funeral was held at the residence of her son, Dr. David Hosack (1769-1835) at 97 Chambers Street, New York City.

This portrait was owned by Colonel Trumbull and was sold after his decease by his executors with other paintings at auction in December, 1844. It was purchased by Aaron Arnold of 22 Canal Street. He was the fourth child of Daniel Arnold (1757-1813) of Haddam and Ogden, New York and his wife Esther Fox. Mrs. Helen (Raymond) Collins, widow of Howard S. Col-

[1] For this information we are indebted to Dr. Theodore Sizer.

Jane (Arden) Hosack painted by John Trumbull. 23¾ x 30 inches.

lins, left the portrait to this Society upon her death in October, 1934. So far as it is known, she was in no way related to the subject.

"Silver of Colonial Connecticut" was the subject of an interesting lecture by Philip Haas Hammerslough at the January meeting. Many fine pieces, including specimens from the Yale University Art Gallery, Wadsworth Atheneum, Mr. Hammerslough's own collection and from the Society's collection, were on exhibition.

At the February meeting, Nelson R. Burr, of the staff of the Library of Congress, gave a talk entitled: "Connecticut and Abraham Lincoln, 1848-1865 as seen in the Robert Todd Lincoln Papers in the Library of Congress." Dr. Burr's talk was attended by a large audience of interested members and friends.

Harold C. Bailey spoke at the March meeting on "Connecticut's Share in Winning Independence at Sea 1775-83." This was a detailed study of the role of privateers during the Revolution and was illustrated with charts. A copy of this talk is available for reference purposes.

The Kodachrome slides recently taken of some of the silver, furniture, portraits, prints and china in the museum were shown at the April meeting. Thompson R. Harlow commented briefly on each slide and closed with a plea for additional funds with which to add to the collection. As a result, sufficient contributions have since been received to continue the project.

More than a hundred members and friends were present for Mr. Israel Sack's lecture at the May meeting entitled: "American Antiques I have known." Illustrations were shown and anecdotes and reminiscences related by this prominent New York antique dealer, making it one of the most enjoyable meetings of the season.

The annual meeting was held on May 18 with reports by the President, Treasurer and Librarian. The incumbent officers of the Society were reelected. In addition, H. H. Armstrong was elected to the Committee on Membership and Spencer Gross to the Committee on Publication. The customary vote to publish the reports and necrology of deceased members was passed and the *Annual Report* should be ready for early distribution.

It has been intimated previously that the newspaper storage problem was rapidly approaching a crisis. The two rooms used for this purpose were considered full ten years ago, and since then we have added a minimum of twelve volumes annually of local papers and have also secured several long runs of older papers. Recent gifts of books for sale, amounting to nearly 1,000 volumes, have also been stored in these rooms. As a result, there is no continuity in arrangement and it is often difficult to locate desired volumes. The more recent years are stacked in piles containing anywhere from eight to twelve volumes and inevitably it is the bottom volume we must bring up.

To alleviate this problem we have cleaned one alcove previously piled high with books. Many of these were damaged by water many years ago, were in hopeless condition, and so were sold for waste paper. Others proved to be duplicates and some not suited to our collection, and were consequently eligible for disposal. Sufficient funds were secured in this process to erect proper shelving for flat storage, two volumes to a shelf, to shelve sixteen years of newspapers. This relieves the pressure temporarily but we are planning to erect a similar unit two and one half times this capacity in the first storage room. In so doing we can adequately shelve the papers now taking up all the floor space and leave fully fifty percent of the usable room for future expansion or other purposes. It is hoped necessary funds will come from additional sales of discarded materials from the alcove.

Mr. Samuel St. John Morgan, of Boston, has added sixty-eight Kellogg prints to our collection. This, with previous gifts from Mr. Morgan, makes a total nearing 200 examples by this old Hartford firm who began as contemporaries of the more famous Currier and Ives.

It has recently been brought to our attention that the miniature of Silas Deane, which was purchased by the Society in December, 1937, is the work of Charles Willson Peale. This of course adds considerably to its interest and value. We have also determined that the miniature of Jesse Deane, secured at the same time, is by Peter Verstille, of Wethersfield. As information becomes available and research progresses, more and more works can be attributed to certain definite artists. For example, the discovery of a signed portrait can well lead to a whole chain of identifications. Our Museum is particularly interested in securing portraits of Connecticut people and portraits by Connecticut artists. It would be appreciated if this were considered when making disposition of such objects. Gifts to this institution may be deducted from federal taxes.

A new binder has been added to our lists of eighteenth century craftsmen. The account book of Alexander Wolcott, 1744-1751, of Windsor, has a hand tooled design on the binding with the name "J Johnson 1744". This appears in the decoration in a diamond shaped border at each corner of a ruled rectangle which is on both covers. Consequently the hand tool was used eight times on this binding.

While taking the Kodachromes, many portraits in storage were brought out so that it was then a relatively simple matter to change the exhibit in the Museum. A number of paintings that have not been hung in five years are now on the walls and all of them are clean and in a good state of preservation. Among them might be mentioned: Reuben Moulthrop's "Thomas Robbins", Ralph Earl's "Samuel and Rebecca (Stillman) Burr", Samuel F. B. Morse's "Stephen Mix and Hannah (Grant) Mitchell", Gilbert Stuart's "Oliver Wolcott, Jr.", John Durand's "Mary (Saltonstall) Whiting", John Trumbull's "Jane Hosack" and "Jonathan and Faith (Robinson) Trumbull", and Richard Jennys' "Thomas Clarke Brinsmade".

In rearranging our stacks to take care of newly catalogued materials, we discovered the long lost portrait of John Bonner (1693-?)* and a delightful primitive oil on canvas of a boy and girl dressed in pre-Revolutionary costumes. Both badly need complete restoration and $300 is required for the purpose. These paintings will be on exhibition in the Museum during the summer for the benefit of those interested in seeing them.

* Probably painted by J. Cooper between 1714 and 1718.

The Price of these Bulletins is ten cents each.